

WYCOMBE Wanderers are back in 'business! After their recent goal drought, which has seen them go through 379 minute's football without scoring, they raced back into top gear and did their title chances the world of good with a well earned triumph at Hayes. To add to their joy, they also clinched their tenth £40 awards from the sponsors (writes Stuart Earp).

Whether they can make up the 10 points lost from their four previous matches remains to be seen but this victory keeps them on top of the Rothmans Isthmian League, now four points clear of Dulwich Hamlet, and with Hendon dropping a point at Barking, the Claremont Road men missed on the chance of going second in the table.

On paper, the visit to Hayes last night (Monday) was the toughest of their last five matches. The Church Road club were fifth in the table and had already showed Wycombe their fighting powers by pulling back from 0-4 down to 3-4 at Loakes Park earlier in the term.

Perhaps it was the added incentive of playing stronger opposition that lifted Wycombe. But another reason was an ace card played by manager Brian Lee. Larry Pritchard had been sadly off form recently carrying his own and the team's problems on his shoulders. His game was suffering accordingly. Brian relieved some of those pressures by pushing the captain up into the forward line. It worked wonders.

Pritchard turned in his best display for weeks, while Steve Perrin was stronger and more forceful and Tony Horseman looked every bit the league's leading goalscorer.

Although not as creative, Phil

Wood — Pritchard's midfield replacement — gave 100 per cent effort while Mick Holfield also improved greatly on recent performances. The one disappointment was Terry Reardon, who was unable to match the standard of his colleagues over the 90 minutes.

Attack and midfield supremacy, however, is worthless unless the defence is tight. As at Enfield on Saturday, the two centre backs Dave Bullock and Keith Mead, dominated everything in the air and made sure they were first to the ball on the ground. Roger Grant also improved while Paul Birdseye made the most of his recall at full back. His intelligent use of throw-ins, previously taken by the overworked Pritchard, was an added bonus.

Whether all this would have happened had Wanderers not taken an early lead is debatable. The goal itself was also questionable, but Wycombe certainly made the most of it, using it as a platform for a steady improvement which crescendoed into total dominance in the last 15 minutes. It was just like old times!

Tony Horseman almost crept through the Hayes defence after only three minutes. Bobby Hatt passing back in the nick of time to his

Hayes 0, Wycombe Wanderers 3

goalkeeper Graham Cracknell, who had a season with Amersham Town. "Bodgers" warning went unheeded. Sixty seconds later he latched onto a high through ball from the defence and bore down on the goal with Hatt level beside him. Suddenly Hatt went sprawling and Horseman prodded the ball home with Mick Bell too late to stop its progress. The referee, well up with play, and his linesman both saw no offence and allowed the goal to stand.

The Wycombe supporters seemed quite shocked — after all it was the first Blues goal they had seen for ages. Wanderers quickly capitalised. Playing the ball along the ground far more than in recent outings, they caught the home defence square on several occasions and attacks involving four to five passes were almost commonplace.

Hayes hit back sporadically. Maskell had to race out to halt Tom James after 12 minutes. Mead thumping away the resulting ricochet.

The visitors were not defending for long. With Pritchard running into open spaces and taking players with

him, gaps began to appear in the Hayes rearward. There was less predictability in the raids and after 20 minutes it seemed Wycombe had caused more trouble than in the whole of their last two matches.

In contrast, Hayes struggled to string anything together. Often they over-weighted their passes which sailed straight through to Maskell or bounced to a Blue shirt on the bumpy surface. In the 27th minute, however, they all but notched an equaliser. This time Wycombe looked square as Dave Verby slipped the ball to John Wilks. Maskell again came out well and dove bravely at the striker's feet, forcing Wilks to shoot just past the far post.

After 38 minutes Wycombe also failed to make the most of a handsome opportunity. From Birdseye's throw to the near post, Pritchard brought the ball under control before crossing cleverly into the middle. The defence had come too far, leaving Horseman with a free header only a few yards out. Bodger, however, mistimed his effort and sent it straight into the arms of Cracknell first bounce.

Hayes recovered briefly before the break but with Wanderers' defence taking no chances they were unable to find a way through.

In the second half Wycombe's improvement grew steadily. They began as they meant to carry on with Pritchard again eluding the defence and crossing perfectly for Perrin to nod towards the top of the net. Cracknell was well positioned to take the effort. Then Holfield tried a snap shot which the goalkeeper did well to gather. Soon after that Mick was back helping out his defence — a sure sign of his improvement.

Bobby Hatt, who had a spell at Loakes Park three years ago, gave a quick reminder of his abundant skills with a cool clearance in the 60th minute but he was powerless to stop Wycombe increasing their lead just 60 seconds later.

Holfield started the move with a perfect ball down the touchline, played under pressure. Horseman produced a burst of real pace to take him clear of the defence. With the chance of a shot himself from a narrow angle, he chose to slip the ball across and there was Perrin, roaring in at the near post to clip home a beautiful worked goal.

In the 67th minute, Holfield

almost made a third when he fired into the side netting. One could see Wycombe's confidence flooding back. The ball moved smoothly from player to player.

Hayes, now managed by Roger Thompson, who took over from Bob Gibbs recently, brought on O'Sullivan for another ex-Wanderer Les Hatridge in the 74th minute but before the substitute even got a sniff of the ball, Wycombe were three up.

The initial error was made by Cracknell whose goalkick fell well short of half way and straight to the feet of Horseman. Lofting the ball over the defence, he found Pritchard speeding through out side. In surprise, Cracknell hesitated for one fatal second and as the ball spun back into Pritchard's path he lobbed the ball over the 'keeper's head and watched joyously as it bounced into the net for a brilliantly taken goal.

Three-nil and £40! It seemed too good to be true after Wycombe's recent displays. But instead of sitting on their lead, the Blues hit back in search of more goals. After 84 minutes Horseman only just failed to connect with yet another Pritchard cross and two minutes later the same player ran cleverly to get in a lightning header from Reardon's low free kick, the ball almost skidding under Cracknell's dive.

Still Wycombe were not content. With just a minute left Perrin surged through on his own and was about to add the fourth goal when Cracknell whipped the ball off his toes. It capped a tremendous revival from Wycombe — one that could well win them the championship.

HAYES: G. Cracknell; K. Kent, R. Hatt, G. Thomas, M. Bell; L. Hatridge (sub. J. O'Sullivan 74 mins); S. Palfrey, J. Wilks; D. Verby, R. Butler, T. James.

WYCOMBE: A. Maskell; P. Birdseye, K. Mead, D. Bullock, R. Grant, T. Reardon, P. Wood, M. Holfield, A. Horseman, S. Perrin, L. Pritchard. Sub. D. Evans (not used).

Half-time: 0-1. **Goalscorers:** Wycombe — Horseman (4), Perrin (6), Pritchard (14).

ONE vital week in May could well decide the Rothmans Isthmian League title this season. The League announced their remaining fixtures this week and from May 5-11, Wycombe Wanderers will play three crucial matches.

On the 7th they are away to Bishop's Stortford, the 9th at home to Walton and Herstham and on Saturday, 11, they travel to Leytonstone to complete their toughest seven days of the season. No matches are easy at this stage

of the term, but Wanderers meet two of the lesser sides in the near future, Walthamstow Avenue and Barking.

Full fixtures: Saturday, April 6 — home to Walthamstow, Tuesday, April 9 — home to Hitchin, Saturday, April 13 — away to Barking; Monday, April 5 — Slough at Wokingham (Berks and Bucks Senior Cup Final); Thursday, April 25 — away to Leatherhead; Saturday, April 27 — home to Ilford;

Tuesday, April 30 — home to Hendon; Tuesday, May 7 — away to Bishop's Stortford; Thursday, May 9 — home to Walton; Saturday, May 11 — away to Leytonstone; Saturday, May 18 — home to Leytonstone.

Wycombe's most serious title contenders, Hendon, have a somewhat easier run-in. Their fixtures are: Tuesday, April 9 — away to Walthamstow, Thursday, April 11 — away to Tooting; Saturday, April 13 — home to

Kingstonian; Wednesday, April 17 — away to St. Albans; Friday, April 19 — away to Hayes; Tuesday, April 23 — away to Dulwich Hamlet; Tuesday, April 30 — away to Wycombe; Thursday, May 2 — home to Hayes; Saturday, May 4 — home to Sutton; Thursday, May 9 — home to Woking; Saturday, May 11 — away to Sutton; Tuesday, May 14 — away to Woking; Thursday, May 16 — home to Bishop's Stortford and Saturday, May 18, away to Leatherhead.

Remaining League fixtures